

Soldiers Don't Cry

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Summary: This was it. John just needed to win once more and again save Earth from destruction, with Cortana at his side. He couldn't lose, wouldn't lose. A oneshot based on the final scenes of Halo 4's campaign, spoilers alert! RnR and I own nothing.

Soldiers Don't Cry

****Soldiers Never Cry****

Author Note: The following contains spoilers as to the campaign of Halo 4, if you haven't beaten it yet, I suggest not reading this, or perhaps read it so it can maybe brace you for the, in my opinion, saddest death in the history of the Halo Franchise.

****Start****

Cortana fought harder to focus on the objective ahead of her and the Chief. She fought to fight the millions upon millions of thoughts streaming through her network, threatening to interfere with her processes as a whole and consume her with endless loops of data that would result in her permanent shutdown.

She had to focus, No, she needed to focus! John was depending on her. As he dodged and weaved between Promethean weapons fire, dispatching them as quickly and efficient as he always did, she was still marvelled that even now he defeated the best the ancients had to offer.

But how could he not? Cortana knew the stakes as well as he did. The Didact was going to compose all of mankind, turn them into pure data then into more Prometheans and repeat this planet after planet until none were left. An efficient manner for a- No! she grit her teeth when her avatar appeared on the second terminal.

She had only experienced pain on another instance. When she was captive of the Gravemind, it had showed her emotion, it had showed her fear and pain. But nowâ€¦ here she was, exposing herself to agony itself to ensure John had his shot at the Didact, at that bastard.

"Aaaaagh!"

She screamed, feeling herself split, duplicate and lose even more of herself as the complications of splitting an AI multiple times did their random effects to her processessâ€¦ the pain didn't ebb away this time, but with it came exhaustion.

The Chief stilled and stared at her before she turned around, hunched over. "It workedâ€¦" her voice was tired, truly tired. She felt tired, like the action alone of maintaining her avatar was stressing enough.

The Didact's barrier collapsed.

"And yet," his voice rang out to them. "You still fail."

The Composer fired. Cortana watched it strike down at Earth, somehow.. It felt worse than any Covenant glassing she had ever witnessed. Her processes, her copiesâ€¦ began speak loudly, some cheered, others saddened and some just didn't care. They all spoke, they all drowned together and it hurt more.

The Didact turned to them, swept his hand and a wave of power swept them. She turned back to John, wanting to yell at him to pull her before-

John-117 reached for Cortana's Memory chip as the wave washed over him. Knocking him clean off his feet and draining his shields, but none of that mattered because before him the pedestal disintegrated. Chip and Cortana with it.

"Cortana!?"

His heart raced, he got no reply. She could have raised him on the Forerunner systems, couldn't she? She always couldâ€¦ but now she was quiet and a cold pit inside his stomach. The feeling he got when Sam had stayed behind on that Covenant ship, when Johnson had been cut down by 343 Guilty Spark. He had lost someone else, he had lost another comrade and more important. A friend.

He felt the cold pit in his stomach swell and burn with something he hadn't felt often, he lifted his gaze to the Didact and anger, burning anger swirled inside him. John swore on Cortana's life he would kill him, he swore it then and there. He stood, grabbed the Forerunner Light Rifle and leapt clean onto the next grav lift. It grabbed him and pushed him to the other platform.

Promethean Knights and Crawlers greeted him. He primed a grenade and threw it, clean in the middle of the formation of crawlers. It detonated a moment later, slaughtering them in its blast. The knights had jumped cleared and moved to cleave John with their energy blades.

He ducked under one, another grenade in hand. He rammed his fist into

its face, pulled back from the dented, mangled metal of the Prometheans helmet. He turned to the other and jumped over it as the first exploded behind him, the blast wave adding to his jump and allowing him to go right over the second.

He landed. It turned and the Light rifle was pressed to its face, too close for shields. He fired once, twice and thrice before it fell back and burned apart. He turned and sprinted up to the next level and stopped, looking for another way to the Didact as the Composer fired. He saw nothing, nothing to help him get across.

His HUD flickered and his mission objective changed. His heart skipped a beat.

"It's alright. But you must hurry."

A waypoint appeared over a grav lift. He knew Cortana wouldn't die that easily, she was like him. A survivor, she always made it. Like him. He rushed forward, stepping into the lift that carried him to the light bridge above and closer to the Didact and the Composer core.

Cortana felt weightless, the pain had stopped and now she was just floating— listening to the other voices of her copies as they argued, discussed and went in circles about everything and nothing. It was a terrifying experience, she supposed. She felt she should be doing something? But what? She focused on remembering what she was doing.

Cort-

She blinked. Another voice that wasn't her or her copies, it was so distant and fuzzled by the others though. She strained to listen above the others.

Cortana!?

John?—John! She thought, remembering. The Didact, Earth and the Composer. She stopped floating and looked around the network. She swarmed the systems, searching and looking until she found him. He was clearing the third platform, she didn't need to be plugged in to see he was looking to finish this fight as well.

She stood on whatever she could. Closed her eyes and tried to activate the grav lift, it was hard— too many of her were running processes of their own, she growled and screamed with all her pent up frustration. "_Shut up_ and _listen_!"

It went quiet, ghostly quiet and she opened her eyes again to see they were all looking at her, attentive, miffed and horrified. So many expressions and emotions were on display before her, she was amazed. For only a second before she said, "We _need_ to help John!"

She realized that these copies were that, copies, and while they were all her rampant spikes of emotion and data, they all still had everything she had. Her memories, her feelings and most importantly. Her love for John.

They exchanged glances, conversed for all of two seconds then cleared

a way for her. She could have smiled, but she nodded instead and pushed forward, lifting her hand and opening the grav lift. She quickly connected with his HUD, easily done by the Forerunner tech at her disposal.

"It's alright," she said softly, "But you must hurry."

She sent it. Watching him ascend to the light bridge where he rushed across it towards the Composer's core. Then the Didact capturing him in the magnetic field, she turned to other copies with a look of pleading. "Lets go save our Spartan, eh girls?" she gave a crooked smile.

They agreed. And together they moved through the system, into the bridge and forced themselves into the hardlight tech around the Didact.

John struggled against the grip the Didact had on him. He was too close to lose now, now to this bastard, not after what he was planning and what he did to the people aboard the research station.

"Humanity's imprisonment is a kindness," the Didact sneered at him, closing his fist and the pressure on John almost tripled, he felt his armor straining to hold against the weight pressing down on it. He groaned.

"In that case. You won't mind if we return the favor!"

He looked up to see several Cortana's forming on the bridge, surrounding the Didact. He glared at her, "Your compassion for mankind is misplaced-"

"I'm not doing this for mankind," she bit back scathingly. Then she leapt forward, her body struck the Didact and he reeled over when his armor malfunctioned then the bridge extended up and his arm was entrapped in bind of Hard Light. He tried to pull himself free, but it wouldn't break. Another jumped, his other arm was bound. Then another and another.

He growled and struggled.

John lifted himself up, grabbed his last grenade from his belt and glared at the Didact. He primed it and jumped forward, slamming it into the chest piece of the forerunner before he broke his binds and staggered towards the fallen Spartan, reaching out before he fell over into the firestorm below.

The Spartan stared a moment, making sure the Didact was good and dead. He turned back to the nuke, his body was tired, his muscles ached and it if weren't for the reactive circuits in his armor he imagined he wouldn't have the strength to move at all. He crawled towards the warhead, he was going to win again.

He gripped the nuke, primed it with some effort and took a calming breath, this was it. He raised his hand, then yelled as he slammed his palm into the detonator. The world turned to white

Then faded to blue. He was still on his knees, but the heavy weight was gone, his muscles ached a bit, but not as much as they did a

moment ago. His hands were empty, as if the explosive hadn't been there.

"Cortana?" he called out. "Cortana. Do you read?" he tried again, "Cortana. Come in." and again.

Was he dead?

He stoodâ€¦ felt someone behind him and he turned around to see who it was. He stopped when he saw it was Cortana, she was smiling at him.

"How?" He didn't know what was going on.

She approached him, slowly, tenderly as if she didn't want to rush this moment. As if it would be their last together. "Oh, I'm the strangest thing you've seen all day?" She joked softly.

"But if we're hereâ€¦?" John trailed off, ignoring the feeling in his gut that was growing darker and darker as she stared at him with something in her eyes.

"It worked. You did it," She said, ignoring his question. "Just like you always do."

He knew he had won, thanks to her. They had won again, he looked around for exit. They still needed to get back to Earth so Halsey could fix her. "So, how do we get out of here?" he asked when he didn't spot an exit.

She looked down with a heartbroken smile before collecting herself and looking back at him. "I'm not coming with you this time."

"What?" the word left his lips before he could think of anything else to say.

Cortana gave him a sad smile. "Most of me is down thereâ€¦ I only held enough back to get you off the ship." she explained, her tone soft and deep with emotion.

"No," He leaned forward as if to grab her wrist and bring her with him, then stopped himself. Knowing he couldn't touch her avatar, "That's not-" he turned his tone stern, but something else built inside his gut. "We go together."

_Like we always have_â€¦

"It's already done." The same sad smile, the same tender stare. The same tone of sadness and love.

He wouldn't, he could not accept that. "I am _not_ leaving you here." Why wouldn't she listen?

She stepped forward. "John," she said softly and raised her hand, surprising the Spartan when she placed it upon his chest and he felt the touch, soft, but it was there. She was real, here in front of him. Real as he was. "I've waited so long to do thatâ€¦" she sounded so close to breaking down it wrenched his heart.

He looked to the side, unable to bear the expression on her face. "Itâ€| was my job to take care of you." he said, hoping it would convince to come with him. Gather herself and together, they would leave together again.

She moved into his view. "We were supposed to take care of each other." He turned to face her again, gathering his strength, "And we did." She added when she met his face again. Making his heart wrench more inside his chest with a pain he hadn't experienced for so long, a pain that frightened him.

"Cortana," he couldn't lose her, not now. Not after all this. "Pleaseâ€|"

Come back with me, just one more time.

She gave him one last long look, one last smile, this one of all the happiness she could muster, just for him. Thenâ€|she stared stepping back away from him.

_No! _John stepped forward, reaching out. "Wait-"

She didn't, she stepped back twice more. Blinked as if fighting back tears, then she opened them again and offered him a few last words. "Welcome home, John."

He stared at her, frozen.

She faded away.

And he was alone in darkness amidst ruins. But most of all, he was empty, cold and a piece of him was now gone with her. _Cortana_â€| he thought, floating there in the dead of space. His heart racing and painful, his vision swimming. He could feel something, something he had only felt when flashbangs detonated, his eyes watered and blinked back the moisture.

He was a Soldier and Soldiers didn't cry. He was a Spartan and Spartans didn't cry. Then, her voice moved through his head.

"_Before this is all over, promise me you'll figure out which one of us the machine_?"

He grit his teeth in pain, a pain he couldn't dull or ignore. While two single droplets of moisture floated in the space between his face and visor.

Soldiers and Spartans didn't cry. But humans did.

****End****

****Well, there is it. It's likely crap, and the dialogue may be wrong. But, I tried. Just had to get it off my chest, so, there it is! Read and review, k?*****

End
file.